

## **Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Fact Sheet**

### **What is pertussis (whooping cough)?**

Pertussis (whooping cough) is an infection of the respiratory system caused by *Bordetella pertussis*, a bacterium.

### **Who gets pertussis (whooping cough)?**

A person usually becomes ill 7 to 10 days after being exposed to someone with the disease, however, incubation can take up to 21 days. Transmission occurs when the ill person coughs around others. The most infectious time is the beginning stage of the disease. Individuals are almost never contagious after the third week of paroxysms (spells of coughing) or after 5 full days of antibiotic treatment.

### **What are the symptoms of pertussis (whooping cough)?**

Classic symptoms of pertussis begin with “cold-like” symptoms and a mild cough. The cough in school age children, adults, and fully immunized children, pertussis may not be a severe illness. Adults may not have the “classic” symptoms but, instead, may have a cough that last for weeks or months and awakens them at night. In infants and young children, especially those who have not had 3 doses of vaccine, pertussis may be very severe, resulting in hospitalization, seizures long-term neurological problems, and even death. Infants do not develop the typical cough, so it is more difficult to know if they have pertussis or something else.

### **How soon after exposures do symptoms of pertussis (whooping cough) appear?**

A person usually becomes ill 7 to 10 days after being exposed to someone with the disease; however, incubation can take up to 21 days.

### **How can pertussis (whooping cough) be diagnosed?**

The best way to diagnose pertussis is through a laboratory culture of a specimen obtained from the nose.

### **What is the treatment for pertussis (whooping cough)?**

Pertussis treatment includes an appropriate course of antibiotics prescribed by their health care provider and the patient should stay isolated from other people until he/she has taken the medication for at least 5 full days of the total course of antibiotics.

### **How can the spread of pertussis (whooping cough) be prevented?**

Anyone who has symptoms of pertussis should not go to work, school, or day care, and should stay isolated from other people until he/she has taken appropriate antibiotics for at least 5 full days of the total course of antibiotics prescribed by their health care provider. If you choose not to treat the illness with antibiotics, you must stay away from others for 3 full weeks after the onset of paroxysms. Parents should inform childcare personnel and teachers if pertussis is suspected in their child. Pertussis should be reported to the local health department.